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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

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EXTENSION PROGRAM PLANNING

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If someone were searching for a phrase which would aptly describe the last few years, probably no better one could be found than "the planning era." Yet, well-organized undertakings have always been planned. For years, of course, our Government has had plans for its various functions, such as national defense, protection of public health, conservation of the national forests, and the promotion of agricultural education. From great engineering projects to the smallest farm structure, from great educational programs to the smallest research project, all are planned. More recently the National Resources Board has been set up whose function it is to study our national resources and to plan their wise utilization and conservation. Nearly every State has its State planning board, and many counties have county planning commissions, created by law. More recently the Agricultural Adjustment Administration has set up its planning section and, lately, committees of farmers and college representatives from the various States met in Washington to plan next year's agricultural-conservation program.

Nearly every State has its problem area, which is being studied that plans may be made for its better utilization. Public programs in land use are being developed rapidly, and the execution of some of these plans is well under way. Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan have their cut-over regions. Many Wisconsin counties have adopted county zoning ordinances. Michigan has similar ordinances in two counties. Some western States have selenium areas. The Western plains States have their drought areas, Illinois has its "Egypt", Indiana has its southern Indiana, and all Kentucky is not in the bluegrass region. As stated before, nearly every State and many counties have their planning boards or commissions of public-spirited men who give freely of their time and energy to study the resources of their respective States or counties and to plan their conservation and utilization to the best interest of the public as a whole. The land-grant colleges have an important function to perform in relation to these various agencies if they are to maintain the leadership which they have established through the years. These institutions are making their contribution. On practically every State planning board we find deans of colleges of agriculture, directors of experiment stations, or directors of extension, and the workers in various subject-matter departments are called upon to furnish information or interpret data for the reports of these boards. The county agent is almost always called upon to serve as a member of the county planning board.

*An address given before the Kansas and the Kentucky annual Extension Conferences, 1936.

About 2 years ago the Department of Agriculture asked the various State experiment stations to assemble certain information relative to production in different types of farming areas of their respective States, and provided additional funds in order that the college staffs might be increased and prompt attention given to this request. About the same time, the extension services were asked to cooperate with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in assembling farmers' opinions regarding certain changes in agricultural production. These activities resulted in a greatly increased volume of valuable information regarding agricultural production becoming available and greatly increased interest on the part of farm people in production trends and in plans for the solution of production and marketing problems.

Why all this emphasis on planning? Agriculture has been out of adjustment. As an individual, the farmer feels that he has increased his efficiency. My father, when a young man, bound grain by hand following a reaper before self-binders were available for general use. Consider the changes in methods used to harvest grain since that time, a short 50 or 60 years ago. You need not have me call your attention to other examples of increased efficiency equally striking, as numerous examples may be drawn from your own experience. If we want a longer range contrast, put 1936 against 1787 - the year the Constitution was framed. Then it took 19 persons living on a farm to produce enough for themselves and for one person living in town. Today 19 persons on the farm can produce enough for themselves and for 66 persons living in town. Between 1910 and 1930, output per worker increased 39 percent in manufacturing and 41 percent in agriculture. In the 5 years between 1922 and 1926 - one of the most remarkable periods in agricultural history - agricultural production increased 27 percent while the crop acreage remained stationary and the amount of labor in agriculture actually decreased. Ask the average city person, however, about the contributions of science and the machine during the past century, and he will at once mention the radio, airplane, automobile, and telephone, and perhaps mass production in industry. He will usually be unaware of the far-reaching influence of technology upon agriculture, though his very existence may depend upon it.

The farmer's very efficiency as well as changing economic and social conditions have been factors in creating whole new series of problems, which are of great importance to agriculture. The State and Federal Extension Services are interested in these ever-changing situations and problems, and we must cooperate in their solution if we are to maintain the position of confidence we now have in the minds of farm people.

We must keep in mind that agriculture is dynamic. It is ever changing. Droughts, floods, new crops, new uses for old products or a new machine are only a few of the conditions that may cause new situations to arise. The human race itself has ever been in a state of flux. Not only has the natural and technological environment constantly been changing, but migrations have caused human beings to be confronted with ever-new situations. Youth, too, is ever pressing on the older generation with new ideas.

Following the Civil War, we had the rapid development of the West, a vast, fertile agricultural region with the accompanying development of

transcontinental transportation systems. This great expansion in our agricultural production was coupled with a development of foreign markets for our agricultural products, accepted by foreign nations really as payments of interest on capital borrowed largely for the purpose of building our railroads and developing our industries.

This market was beginning to shrink somewhat before the World War. Also the first fertility of the land had been extracted and insects and plant diseases were beginning to take their toll. Extension work had its beginning in the first realization of these problems confronting agriculture. The World War delayed the critical stage of this problem with the increased demand for food products to feed the vast European armies, and our entrance into the World War provided the opportunity for extension work to prove the effectiveness of its type of organization by the manner in which the production problems of that period were met.

Extension had its inception in meeting an emergency - the control of the cotton boll weevil, and its first great expansion during the war period in handling another emergency problem - the expansion of our food production to meet war needs. It steadily gained in favor in the public mind during the reconstruction years following the World War. Its activities, however, were diverted from the intense agricultural production problems of the war period to marketing, production efficiency, and many perplexing social and economic problems of the post-war period.

During this period 4-H club work developed with tremendous strides. Home demonstration work began to come into its own. Social and economic problems hardly thought of in the beginning of extension work were now emphasized on almost every Extension program. Increasing emphasis is being placed on problems of the home and of the community, and extension, with its broad program of education, is increasingly focusing its attention on problems of this type. Extension administrators are more and more coming to realize that satisfying living conditions are an important objective, yet not losing sight of the fact that a satisfactory income is a strong determining factor in bringing about satisfying living conditions.

As these changes have come about the older methods of program building and their execution along project lines do not satisfy, and it becomes necessary that our technique in developing extension programs change with the times.

In extension work as in other activities, we find that periods of stability are usually followed by periods of relatively rapid change. We have been in a period of rapid change. We hear the desire to get back to the regular extension program expressed by many. True, we do desire to get away from emergency work and cease to devote our energies to problems of the moment. But, as far as I am concerned, I believe it would be fatal to our service if we should take our programs of 1930-32 and attempt to carry them out in the same manner in 1937. New approaches have been developed; new information is available which we should be foolish not to use; new methods are being developed which will increase the effectiveness of our Extension work, just as the new findings in agriculture have improved the farmer's efficiency.

It isn't that the old methods are not good, but rather that the newer methods must be added to our previous knowledge for best results under present conditions. During any period of rapid change there is a tendency for efforts at solution of any problem to take many different courses. As the new problems are attacked by workers in 48 different States it is not expected that they will all reach a solution in the same manner, but it is desirable that after a certain period of time has elapsed there be an evaluation of the various methods. We are now at a stage when we should evaluate the approaches to program building for extension workers.

If I interpret correctly the contributions that are being made toward the solution of this problem by the several States, I believe the tendency is toward building a well-coordinated extension program and away from the development of individual, unrelated extension projects; then to concentrate the whole force of the extension organization on its execution. A few weeks ago I attended a conference of State group-discussion leaders and was agreeably surprised to find that they seemed to be searching, not for the development of group discussion as such, but to find its place among the many technical methods of extension teaching. It is generally accepted that marketing problems have their production phases. We have long argued that it is easier to market advantageously uniform products from a given area, and as a concrete result there is concerted effort on the part of market gardeners in many areas to limit the number of varieties of each vegetable now being produced. Many of the Southern States have their one-variety cotton programs. Home management has been drawn into the outlook, and in the last 2 years many States, recognizing the consumption factor in outlook, have sent their home-management specialist to the National Outlook Conference. This year in Indiana, the home-management specialist will attend seven district outlook conferences of county agents, home demonstration agents, and farm men and women where she will discuss the farm-family-living outlook for 30 minutes before the general session of both men and women. Many of our dairy problems have their feeding phase, and thus the crop specialists and the dairy specialists are drawn together in conducting a dairy program. Illinois has a soil-conservation committee which is attempting to correlate all the forces of the university on the soil-conservation program. Nebraska and Ohio have each recently appointed a former county agent supervisor as supervisor of programs. They will attempt to correlate the work of the various specialists and to focus their united attention upon the solution of farm problems as they come from the counties.

Let us consider briefly some of the approaches which are now being made by different States to the problem of building local extension programs. First, there is the old "major sources of income" approach. This was rather widely used during the late "teens" and early twenties. More recently, we have been making a statistical approach using census data, farm-management records, crop and livestock reports, outlook information, crop-yields, and price data. Available information of this type has been greatly increased through the county program-planning project fostered by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and cooperated in by all our State experiment stations and extension services. Planning boards, State and county, have assembled a vast amount of information that was formerly not available in a form we could use.

Kansas is now using what they call an "economic analysis" approach. Two-day conferences are held in each type of farming area, where an effort is made to analyze the economic problems of that territory. Delegates are sent from each type of farming area to a State meeting. These delegates form a State committee, and an effort is made to work their recommendations into a definite State program. The Extension Service, State and county, uses the recommendations of those conferences as a basis for extension programs.

Minnesota is developing the family approach, in a few counties. Program discussion meetings of men, women, boys, and girls are held in each township, where problems affecting the income and life of that family are discussed, analyzed, and worked into a program.

Ohio is using a "soil productivity index" approach, particularly to their soil-conservation problems. Various crops are given a productivity index, depending on the rapidity with which each depletes or builds soil productivity. Using these indices, they attempt to build a crop rotation that will maintain or increase the present productivity of the soil. Many Southern States use a "farm budget" approach to program making. They attempt to get the farmer and his family to estimate the amount of food for the family and feed for the livestock that will be necessary during the coming year. Crop production is then so planned as to produce this food and feed with a minimum of expense for feed purchases.

Each of these methods of approach has good arguments for its adoption under certain conditions. Probably no one method is best under all conditions. There are a few principles however that are recognized by all and which these various methods make use of in varying degree. The first and probably the most important of these is, that provision is made for farmer participation, both in planning and in execution. This is essential from at least three standpoints. First, the farmer must recognize that he has a problem and that this is the one problem that is most important to his success or the well-being of his family. If he does not recognize it as such he will not be interested in following any recommendations which may be made for its solution. In the second place, farmer participation in analyzing the problem forms a practical check upon our theoretical planning. It is very easy for us to get all steamed up about some problem that may not seem at all serious to the farmer, and until the farmer does consider it serious we shall not get very far in its solution. There is grave danger that we, in our enthusiasm, may oversell some of our pet ideas and then wonder why they do not work out as we expect. If problems are presented to farmer committees without overemphasis, we may depend upon the good judgment of the committee members to winnow out that which is unimportant, and to direct our attention to that which is most worth while. Third, program making is an educational process in itself, and from this standpoint it is desirable that a relatively large number of people participate in the discussions concerning it.

A second important consideration in all program planning is the use of trained advisers. As our American civilization becomes older and more complex, it is more and more important that trained men and women be made use of in analyzing difficult situations, developing solutions, and putting the solutions

into effect. Never in history have training and experience been held in higher public esteem than at present. If this high standing is to be maintained, it is incumbent on every extension worker to be doubly sure that he continue to be worthy of this high regard by making the fewest possible recommendations where there is a possibility of his being wrong.

A third principle is the continuity of the program itself. Time is a factor in educational results. Though every effort must be made to keep the program abreast of the changing problems, yet there must be a close relationship between the programs of one year with those of the next. Last year's program and the results obtained must be an important consideration when next year's program is planned. It is often desirable to change the emphasis from year to year from one phase of the problem to another, but it is well to keep in mind that changes in farm practices come about slowly. Several years' work on the same problem is almost always necessary for maximum results. New approaches are desirable to create and hold interest, but care must be exercised that we not wander from the main problem.

There is a fourth factor which has wrecked many a well-planned program. It is the fact that often the farmer's individual interest seems to be in conflict with the interests of the group as a whole. We need not look far for illustrations of this condition. We all recognize that there is a relationship between supply and price. For example, with a large supply of potatoes and a low price it is to the interest of the entire group of potato producers that the production the following year be reduced. If the supply is reduced, then everyone confidently expects a higher price; if the price is higher, then each individual would like to have more potatoes to sell. Therefore, he is interested in having everyone reduce production except himself. Another illustration may be drawn from experiences following the price collapse in 1929 and 1930. With low prices being received for his products, every farmer tightened his belt, got up earlier in the morning, and worked later at night to produce a larger quantity for the simple reason that at the lower price he had to sell a larger quantity to obtain sufficient money to meet his current obligations.

The experiences of farm people with the outlook project, with farm organizations and with the agricultural-adjustment and the agricultural-conservation programs account for some progress being made in their thinking on this point, and many farmers are coming to realize that in the long run their group interest and their individual interest may not be in serious conflict.

How may an extension program be developed to meet the conditions here set out? Here is the method followed in one State. A committee of agricultural specialists classified their activities into five major lines: Dairy, fruit, vegetables, potatoes, and poultry. Others might be added such as tobacco in Kentucky, or grain production in the Corn Belt. Each specialist then listed what he had to contribute to the solution of the major problems as he knew them in the different types of farming areas in these different major fields. Farm-management and marketing specialists were concerned with all; plant pathologists with certain ones; veterinarians with others; and agronomists with still others.

Simultaneously, county agents were holding program discussion meetings with farmers. Farmers' problems were classified similarly, and farmer committees were set up. These committees were large enough to permit division into subcommittees. New members might be added should occasion arise. County agents reported the problems to the college, where the specialists' solutions were checked with the farmers' problems submitted. After this was done, certain specialists or groups of specialists were assigned to meet with the farmer committees in the counties to develop the plan of procedure that was to be followed by extension workers in that county. Now they have a dairy program, not a cow-testing association project, an alfalfa project, etc. The farmer likes this method. He knows he has a problem that affects the enterprise from which he receives a considerable portion of his income. He is not concerned with the particular scheme of project classification that may be in vogue at the moment at the agricultural college or the United States Department of Agriculture. Specialists still have their project assignments in which they specialize, but they are developing a new tolerance toward the contributions that may be made by their fellow workers. Finally it enables the Extension Service to focus the full strength of its respective departments upon the solution of a problem rather than attacking it piecemeal.

In conclusion, may I review briefly what has been said. Agriculture is dynamic. Conditions which influence it are constantly changing. Therefore, the approach to agricultural programs for the education of farm people must be ever changing. Extension workers have an enviable record for rendering worth-while assistance in emergencies, but the test is their ability to help develop extension programs that will help to prevent situations which bring these emergencies. This will depend upon the manner in which the programs that are developed meet farm needs. There are five principles to keep in mind in developing these extension programs. First, there must be farmer participation in developing the program in order that we may have his interest in carrying it out later. Second, trained advisers should be used in studying the problems preliminary to the program, in preparing the program itself, and in executing it later. Third, there must be continuity from year to year. Fourth, we must recognize that the farmer's individual interest is sometimes inimical to his group interest, especially from a short-time viewpoint. Our program should be such that the farmer may adhere to a policy of group action not inimical to his individual interests. Fifth, our program must be based on facts established by research and experience, and results must come about through education of the whole group.

